UNITED
NATIONS

A

General Assembly

Distr.
GENERAL

A/48/283
11 August 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Forty-eighth session
Item 115 (b) of the provisional agenda*

HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS, INCLUDING ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES FOR IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

United Nations Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea

Report of the Secretary-General

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. By its resolution 47/114 of 16 December 1992, the General Assembly authorized, by consensus, the establishment of the United Nations Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea (UNOVER). In its resolution 47/114, the Assembly took into account that the authorities directly concerned had requested the involvement of the United Nations in verifying the referendum and registered their commitment to respect its results. The present report is submitted in pursuance of paragraph 5 of General Assembly resolution 47/114. It presents the findings of the Secretary-General on the referendum and the activities of UNOVER from its establishment in January 1993 until its conclusion in April 1993.

A. Background

2. With a geographical area of nearly 125,000 square kilometres, Eritrea has a population estimated between 3 million and 3.5 million. Close to 85 per cent of the population lives in rural areas, of which 25 to 30 per cent is nomadic or semi-nomadic. The population consists of nine groupings: Afar, Bilen, Hadareb, Kunama, Nara, Rashaida, Saho, Tigre and Tigrinya. Nine languages are spoken.

3. Located on the Red Sea Coast just above the Horn of Africa, Eritrea was an Italian colony from 1890 to 1911, when it became a British Protectorate. Its federation with Ethiopia took place in 1952. That arrangement ended in 1962 when Eritrea's federal status was abrogated and the territory was incorporated into Ethiopia as a province. For three decades thereafter, Eritreans struggled for self-determination, first within a federation and then in full independence.

4. In May 1991, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) took control of the Eritrean capital of Asmara and established itself as the Provisional Government of Eritrea. The Provisional Government of Eritrea consisted of legislative, executive and judicial bodies. The executive was responsible, among other things, for issuing and implementing proclamations.

B. Eritrean request and United Nations response

5. In May 1991, the newly formed Provisional Government of Eritrea met with delegations from Ethiopia and made a commitment to hold a referendum on the future of Eritrea within two years. The meeting took place in London under the auspices of the United States of America.

6. In July 1991, a Conference on Peace and Democracy held at Addis Ababa brought together all the Ethiopian political parties and other social groups. It formally recognized the right of the Eritrean people to determine their political future by an internationally supervised referendum.

7. In a letter dated 13 December 1991, Mr. Meles Zenawi, the President of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia, informed the Secretary-General about the decisions of the Conference on Peace and Democracy. President Zenawi noted that both the Transitional Government of Ethiopia and the Provisional Government of

Eritrea had registered their commitment to respect the results of the referendum in Eritrea. He asked that the United Nations play an active role in verifying a free and fair referendum. In May 1992, the Referendum Commissioner of Eritrea invited the Secretary-General to send a United Nations delegation to observe and to verify the freedom, fairness and impartiality of the entire referendum process which was to begin in July 1992 and end in April 1993.

8. The Secretary-General brought the matter to the attention of the President of the General Assembly and asked for informal consultations among the regional groups to ascertain their views on this invitation. Subsequently, a technical team visited Eritrea between 30 July and 8 August 1992 to gather information about a possible United Nations role in the referendum and thereafter submitted a report to the Secretary-General. The findings of the team were contained in the Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly of 19 October 1992 (A/47/544).

9. The Secretary-General's report to the General Assembly took note that international supervision of the referendum in Eritrea had been supported by the Addis Ababa Agreements of 1991. Since the Secretary-General considered the referendum process an important step towards the establishment of democracy, and for the promotion of regional stability, he recommended the establishment of a United Nations Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea.

C. Establishment of the United Nations Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea

10. Based upon these recommendations of the Secretary-General, the General Assembly, in its resolution 47/114, declared its decision to establish UNOVER with the following mandate:

"(a) To verify the impartiality of the referendum authorities and organs, including the Referendum Commission, in all aspects and stages of the referendum process;

"(b) To verify that there exists complete freedom of organization, movement, assembly and expression without hindrance or intimidation;

"(c) To verify that there is equal access to media facilities and that there is fairness in the allocation of both the timing and length of broadcasts;

"(d) To verify that the referendum rolls are properly drawn up and that qualified voters are not denied identification and registration cards or the right to vote;

"(e) To report to the referendum authorities on complaints, irregularities and interferences reported or observed and, if necessary, to request the referendum authorities to take action to resolve and rectify such complaints, irregularities or interference;

"(f) To observe all activities related to the registration of voters, the organization of the poll, the referendum campaign, the poll itself and the counting, computation and announcement of the results." (A/47/544, para. 7)

1. Structure and composition of the United Nations Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea

11. On 6 January 1993, the Secretary-General, accompanied by Under-Secretary-General James O. C. Jonah, visited Eritrea for a first-hand appraisal of the referendum process. Upon his return, he appointed Mr. Samir Sanbar as his Special Representative and Chief of the UNOVER with its headquarters at Asmara. UNOVER also set up its headquarters and a regional office at Asmara, and other regional offices at Keren and Mendefera.

12. In the composition of UNOVER, several considerations were borne in mind. There was peace in Eritrea. The decision to hold a referendum had been taken by the concerned Eritrean authorities. The organization of the referendum effort by the Eritrean Referendum Commission was already under way. There was little evidence of political tensions or conflicting positions over the referendum. In fact, civic peace and security in Eritrea were remarkable for a society emerging from a prolonged conflict. Asmara, with a population of 400,000, for example, had only 123 policemen. Accordingly, the Secretary-General decided that a relatively small international staff of civilians, supported by local personnel, would be sufficient to fulfil the mandate of UNOVER.

13. The UNOVER core team consisted of 21 international staff, headed by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General. Sixteen different nationalities were represented. As Chief of the Mission, the Special Representative was to provide overall political direction to the observation and verification mission. The Asmara headquarters was made up of a small team, including the Chief Electoral Observer, the Special Assistant of the Special Representative, a Political Affairs Officer, and an Administration Unit comprising four officers. Each of the UNOVER regional offices at Asmara, Keren and Mendefera, was headed by a regional coordinator and assisted by three to four electoral officers organized in two mobile teams of two persons each.

14. During 12 and 18 April 1993, 86 observers joined the 21 members of the UNOVER core team for the last phase of the referendum process. Of the additional 86 observers, 57 were seconded by Member States, 8 from United Nations specialized agencies and project personnel, 3 from the United Nations Secretariat, 5 from the Economic Commission for Africa, 3 from international non-governmental organizations, and 10 qualified local international staff. At its maximum strength, UNOVER had observers from the following 35 countries: Afghanistan, Argentina, Austria, Canada, Cote d'Ivoire, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, Lebanon, Madagascar, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Peru, Portugal, Russia, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Togo, Turkey, Uganda, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America, Venezuela, Viet Nam, Zaire and Zambia. These were deployed in 16 teams in the Asmara region, 15 teams in the Keren region, and 14 teams in the Mendefera region. Each team included two observers, one driver and one interpreter.

15. UNOVER held training seminars in order to brief the observers on the code of conduct, on the UNOVER modus operandi, and to provide them with specific instructions for the observation of the voting and the counting of the ballots. The core team of 21 UNOVER observers received intensive in-depth training at the beginning of the mission before being deployed to their respective regions.

2. Guidelines for the United Nations Observer Mission to Verify the Referendum in Eritrea

16. UNOVER was given clear guidelines for carrying out its mandate. As provided in the Secretary-General's report of 19 October 1992 (A/47/544), UNOVER was expected "to gather factual information about the conduct of the referendum and, in particular, the decision of the electorate; to recognize that the ultimate judgement about the referendum process will be made by the electorate themselves and that its role will be to take note of the decision of the electorate, as they determine their fate in a referendum; to recognize the independent character of the Referendum Commission and establish a relationship with it on that basis; and, in its capacity as observer, to make constructive contributions to ensure the success of the referendum at every stage of the process" (para. 8).

17. Three main phases of the referendum process were foreseen: the registration of voters; the referendum campaign; and the poll itself. The first priority for all activities undertaken by UNOVER was to support, monitor and evaluate the impartiality of the referendum in all its phases.

II. REFERENDUM PROCESS IN ERITREA

18. The referendum process in Eritrea had started much earlier than the establishment of UNOVER in December 1992. Thus, on 7 April 1992, the Provisional Government of Eritrea issued a Referendum Proclamation which laid down the rules and regulations to govern the referendum process. The Proclamation also established a Referendum Commission and a Referendum Court, in addition to setting out the referendum's terms of reference.

A. Referendum Commission

19. The Referendum Commission consisted of a Referendum Commissioner and four Deputy Commissioners designated by the Secretary-General of the Provisional Government of Eritrea. The work of the Commission was carried out by: a secretariat; an Identification and Registration Board; a Publicity and Information Board; and an Election Board. Each was headed by a Deputy Commissioner. At the regional level, the Commission's activities were organized into 10 provincial and 140 district offices.

20. The main functions of the Referendum Commission, according to the Referendum Proclamation, were to:

(a) Guarantee a referendum that was free and fair;

(b) Identify and register eligible voters;

(c) Create the procedures for the referendum itself;

(d) Publicize the referendum and inform the voters.

21. To create the proper environment for preparing and carrying out the election, the Referendum Commission was entrusted with making arrangements to:

(a) Guarantee freedom of speech, assembly, movement and press for the purposes of the referendum;

(b) Ensure the security of voters;

(c) Publicize the referendum and encourage the free exchange of views;

(d) Facilitate the return and vote of all eligible voters;

(e) Address promptly, adequately and fairly all complaints regarding rules and instructions about the referendum and its conduct;

(f) Ensure law and order during the referendum campaign and voting.

B. Referendum Court

22. The Referendum Proclamation established a Referendum Court consisting of a Presiding Judge and two others. The appeal procedure for a person denied participation in the referendum allowed him or her to petition the Election Board until four weeks before the first polling day. If rejected by the Board, the appellant could appeal to the Referendum Court until two weeks before the first day of voting. The Proclamation stated that decisions handed down by the Court "... shall be final and may not be challenged by any other authority". International verification of this procedure for appeal was an important element in the responsibilities of UNOVER.

C. Terms of reference

23. Under article 3 of the Eritrean Referendum Proclamation, the referendum put a single question to the electorate: "Do you approve that Eritrea should become an independent sovereign State?". Voters were to respond either in the affirmative or the negative.

D. Phases of referendum

24. The actual conduct of the referendum was divided into three phases. The first phase corresponded to the registration of voters which started in mid-October 1992 and was completed on 1 March 1993. The referendum campaign constituting the second phase began on 17 February 1993 and ended two days before the first day of voting. The final and third phase was the voting itself which lasted for three days, starting on 23 April and ending on 25 April 1993. The official results were announced on 28 April 1993.

25. Throughout all three phases, the Referendum Commission faced two major tasks: to make each and every citizen an informed and consciously responsible voter; and to make certain each voter mastered the voting techniques so as to ensure a truly free choice and to thwart fraud.

26. The first task was indeed not easy. The low levels of literacy in a multilingual population produced considerable difficulties of communication and administration. For instance, the Referendum Commission found very few literate Afar speakers to be its officials.

27. Furthermore, for a long time Eritreans had been excluded from decision-making on central issues and deprived of direct participation as "conscious voters" in elections. This absence of electoral practice presented an additional challenge to creating informed and knowledgeable voters.

28. Organizationally, the consequences of three decades of conflict further complicated the work of creating institutions to carry out the elections and inform voters on voting procedures. The lack of a reliable census, the absence of a civil register and, hence, of an electoral register, and the scarcity of persons qualified in conducting elections were among the obstacles to fulfilling this task.

1. Registration

29. The Eritrean Referendum Proclamation made the Referendum Commission responsible for "verifying the identity and eligibility of the people of Eritrea, residing in Eritrea or abroad, who may wish to participate in the referendum". According to the Proclamation, any person having Eritrean citizenship and who was of the age of 18 years or older or attained that age at any time during the registration period, was qualified to be a voter. The general conditions for qualifying as an Eritrean citizen were defined in the Nationality Proclamation issued by the Provisional Government of Eritrea on 6 April 1992. For verifying the identity or eligibility of citizens, the Referendum Commission relied on the investigations and decisions of the Department of Internal Affairs. The Commission therefore registered as a voter any person eligible under the Referendum Proclamation who possessed a citizen's identity card issued by the Department.

30. Registration was extended from 22 February to 1 March 1993 in order to process a backlog of 2,000 Eritrean nationals wishing to register. Overall, a total of 1.1 million Eritreans registered to vote: 861,074 persons in Eritrea, 154,136 persons in the Sudan, 66,022 in Ethiopia, 43,765 in Saudi Arabia and 76,000 in all other countries combined. These countries included Djibouti, Germany, India, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and the United States of America.

31. Of Eritrea's estimated population of 3 million to 3.5 million, 50 per cent are under the minimum voting age of 18 years. Accordingly, there were only 1.5 million to 1.75 million eligible Eritreans from which the eventual electorate of 1.1 million voters were registered. In addition, the relative remoteness of some regions, and traditional restrictions against public activities for women in some places, may also have reduced the number of people taking part in the referendum.

32. The presence of UNOVER and other international observers helped to deal with some problems of cultural practices. For example, upon receiving reports that some women in the Gash and Setit province had been forbidden to register by

their male relatives, a UNOVER team raised the issue in a visit to the area. Eventually, the UNOVER team was informed that women there would be allowed to register from then on.

33. As part of the verification of the registration campaign, UNOVER asked the Referendum Commission about the status of participants in the Referendum of certain prisoners awaiting trial for collaboration with the Ethiopian authorities during the war. The Referendum Commission immediately took up the matter with the Department of Internal Affairs. It was subsequently understood that all such prisoners who had not been tried and convicted would be provided with registration cards and be allowed to exercise their right to vote in the Referendum. Shortly thereafter, UNOVER Regional Coordinators were invited to visit the prisons, in order to interview prisoners in this category awaiting trial and to ensure that they had been registered to vote. A number of these visits by the three Regional Offices confirmed that this class of prisoners had indeed registered, and would be able to vote in prison. The UNOVER observers were informed that 462 prisoners in Senbel and Hazhaz prisons at Asmara City were registered. This constituted an important and successful assertion by UNOVER of a fundamental electoral principle.

34. The members of the Eritrean Popular Liberation Army (EPLA) registered directly in barracks, whether in the main provinces such as Asmara, Mendefera, Barentu and Afabet, or in numerous small villages close to the frontiers, like Sirdaka, Forto, Tessenei and Ghirmaika. In agreement with UNOVER, the Referendum Commission decided to authorize EPLA members to cast their vote one week prior to the official Referendum days, since most of them had to be deployed for duty during those days. It was also agreed that observers would be present during this exceptional voting and that ballot boxes would be kept sealed until 7 p.m. of 25 April 1993, the last regular day of the referendum. UNOVER observers were present at the voting in the barracks at Asmara, Mendefera and Keren.

35. The Referendum Commission also made special arrangements to register those freedom fighters, not belonging to EPLA, who were at their duty stations. They numbered 79,295 of the 861,074 registered voters in Eritrea.

36. On the basis of UNOVER observation, the registration campaign was conducted smoothly, notwithstanding that nationality identification was simultaneous with the registration of eligible voters. In conducting the registration, those Commission representatives encountered by UNOVER observers acted with due impartiality.

2. Referendum campaign

37. The referendum campaign officially began on 17 February 1993, and ended on 21 April, two days before the first polling day. All interested parties were urged to freely organize, form movements, and assemble and express their views for or against the independence of Eritrea without hindrance or intimidation. To that end, three groups registered with the Referendum Commission to campaign in favour of independence: the National Union of Eritrean Women, the National Union of Eritrean Youth, and the National Union of Eritrean Workers. No organization registered to campaign for a "no" vote.

38. During the last several weeks preceding the polling days, political rallies were observed in the form of gatherings, festivities, concerts and dances. It was reported and observed that members of EPLF had been campaigning throughout Eritrea, often travelling in small groups around the countryside.

39. For its part, the Referendum Commission's efforts at this time were devoted to a civic education campaign. Thus, the primary purpose of the Publicity and Information Board of the Referendum Commission during this period was to explain voting procedures and techniques to as many of the electorate as possible. A significant effort was devoted to producing public education materials: 800,000 posters in four main languages; voter manuals of which 10,000 were printed in Arabic and Tigrigna; and videos for television in nine languages. The media, schools, youth and women's associations, and a touring theatre group also disseminated information. Ten mobile teams of two to three persons travelled to remote areas of the country where there was no access to the media.

40. Although the media consisted of one newspaper, published twice weekly, one television station and one radio, coverage of the referendum process was thorough. The wider outreach of the national radio station, broadcasting in Arabic and Tigrigna, made it the most effective medium. The referendum comprehensive education programme, including a question-and-answer portion, was aired every day in Arabic and Tigrigna for 10 minutes in each language. There was a transmission three days a week at Kunama and Tigre, also for 10 minutes each. Television in Eritrea has three weekly broadcasts of three hours each. The Referendum Commission was allotted 10 minutes in each broadcast.

41. With respect to free access to the media and equal allocation of resources among the campaigning parties, UNOVER received no reports of complaints, nor did it observe any flagrant violations. In the absence of opposing parties, the relevance of equal allocation of time to the impartiality of the process was rather limited.

42. Voting simulations were undertaken throughout Eritrea. Their degree of sophistication varied according to the people's level of understanding. In remote, rural areas, the programme was usually limited to the basic essential information, such as the meaning of the "red" and the "blue" ballots, and practice voting. At the same time, in other areas, voters were taught about such issues as absentee ballots and tender ballots. Community leaders, village elders, youth volunteers and other civilian groups were visibly involved in civic education campaigns.

3. Voting procedure

43. A total of 1,560,000 ballot papers were printed, numbered, perforated and bound for official use. UNOVER observers made frequent visits to the printing press to verify that the preparation of ballots was lawful and procedurally correct.

44. The ballot paper was printed on opaque brown paper to enhance the privacy of the vote. It had three detachable segments. The first two parts were red and the last blue. The first portion was numbered and retained by the second officer as a control measure to guard against repeat voting. The second red

portion was a negative vote and the third blue portion was for an affirmative vote. Inside the private booth, voters made their choice and detached one portion from the other. The portion of the ballot paper corresponding to the choice made by the voter was deposited in the ballot box. The remaining portion was deposited inside the booth in a cardboard "trash" box. The contents of this box were emptied out at the end of each of three polling days and burned along with the voter registration cards.

45. Forty-five persons received instruction as polling officer trainers at Asmara. Using the multiplier training methodology they, in turn, trained 6,000 polling station officials for the provinces.

46. Two polling officials were in charge of each electoral table. The first officer verified that the potential voter possessed an orange voter-registration card and was on the electoral roll. Both officers carried out cross-check and double vote control procedures. Finally, the second officer received the voter-registration card and supplied the voter with a ballot paper.

47. The building of polling stations - mat huts called "agnets" constructed from local materials - had been completed in most provinces by the beginning of April. In the cities, the polling station sites were identified in administrative offices, schools and other appropriate buildings, and structural changes necessary for the polling stations were made. In the provinces of Barka, Gash and Setit and Sahel, there was some delay in building the polling stations. In the coastal areas of Semhar province, a hurricane in mid-April completely destroyed 60 per cent to 70 per cent of the polling stations. However, new "agnets" were built or other alternative arrangements were made before polling began.

III. REFERENDUM

48. All necessary electoral materials left Asmara in early April for the respective destinations in Eritrea and abroad. Inadequate transportation and communications had to be overcome in achieving their delivery on time.

49. For the actual voting, a total of 1,012 polling stations were set up by province:

Achele Guzai	157
Asmara	146
Barca	87
Dankalia	47
Gash and Setit	91
Hamasien	104
Sahel	59
Semhar	44
Senhit	120
Serae	157

50. On 22 April 1993, the Secretary-General's Special Representative and the Referendum Commissioner officially announced the beginning of the referendum.

The referendum took place on 23, 24 and 25 April 1993. The polling stations stayed opened from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

51. During the three days of the referendum, UNOVER teams covered almost all of the 1,012 polling stations. The number of polling stations visited in the Asmara region was 351 (96 per cent coverage); in the Keren region, 278 (88 per cent coverage); and in the Mendefera region, 257 (84 per cent coverage). Some of the polling stations were visited more than once, especially in the urban areas.

52. On 27 April, the Referendum Commission announced the official provisional results of the referendum. Total number of registered voters was 1,174,654. Of these, 1,154,001 participated in the referendum voting, constituting voter turnout of 98.24 per cent.

53. Of those who cast their votes, 1,098,015 voted "yes", 1,825 voted "no", 323 votes were invalid and 53,838 were cast by tendered ballots. This revealed that 99.805 per cent of those who participated in the vote had voted for independence and only 0.17 per cent voted against independence.

54. Reports of UNOVER observers indicated that, in general, the referendum was well organized and conducted in an orderly and smooth manner. The officials of the Referendum Commission were present, without exception, and there were no essential electoral materials missing in the polling stations. No cases of intimidation were reported or observed. The secrecy of the vote was generally respected although the lack of electoral practice created some minor procedural difficulties.

55. Also, it was reported that in certain polling stations the ballots were counted on the evening of 24 April, before the end of the referendum. Appropriate corrective measures were suggested by UNOVER and taken by the Referendum Commission. These incidents did not, however, affect the outcome of the vote.

56. On the basis of the information and observations of UNOVER, on 27 April 1993, the Secretary-General's Special Representative officially announced that "On the whole, the referendum process in Eritrea can be considered to have been free and fair at every stage, and that it has been conducted to my satisfaction".

IV. ACTIVITIES OF THE UNITED NATIONS OBSERVER MISSION TO VERIFY THE REFERENDUM IN ERITREA

A. Regional activities

57. The electoral teams from the three regional offices of UNOVER, based at Asmara, Keren and Mendefera, made visits to polling station sites in their respective regions of responsibility. The purpose of these visits was:

(a) To develop and maintain an effective working relationship with the local authorities and the local population;

(b) To observe and verify the final stage of the registration campaign, and the distribution of citizen identification cards and voter registration cards;

(c) To verify the information provided by the Referendum Commission on the names and locations of the polling stations, and on the number of registered voters;

(d) To observe and verify voter education and the political campaigns;

(e) To assess road conditions and logistical needs for UNOVER observers during the last phase of the referendum;

(f) To prepare plans, road maps and itineraries for the deployment of UNOVER observers during the polling days.

58. The provinces of Asmara, Dankalia, Hamasien and Semhar constituted the region of responsibility under the Asmara Regional Office. The office was consistently staffed with four officers, including one Regional Coordinator. Of the total of 365 polling stations located in the region, 335 were visited by UNOVER electoral teams, constituting a coverage of 92 per cent.

59. The Keren Regional Office had under its responsibility the western provinces of Barka, Gash and Setit, and Senhit, as well as the province of Sahel. The office was also staffed with four officers, including the Regional Coordinator. Each team member was assigned a province of responsibility, whereby he/she was expected to draw up the deployment plan for the observers during the referendum days. Of the total 339 polling stations located in the region, 216 were visited by Keren teams, constituting a coverage of 64 per cent.

60. The Mendefera Regional Office was responsible for the provinces of Achele Guzai and Serae. The office was initially staffed with three electoral officers. At the end of March, an additional member joined the team. Of the total 210 polling station sites in the region, 113 were visited by UNOVER electoral teams, constituting a coverage of 54 per cent, or 80 per cent of the accessible polling stations.

61. The UNOVER observers combed through the provinces, visited polling station sites, assessed road conditions, prepared detailed directions and planned travel itineraries for the observers of the final phase. Particularly hazardous areas, owing to poor surface conditions or land mines, were identified and duly reported. In many parts of Eritrea, road conditions are poor even for the use of four-wheel-drive vehicles. In the absence of up-to-date maps, observers relied heavily on local assistance and self-drawn maps.

62. The UNOVER observers maintained constant dialogue with members of the local authorities, including the Governors of all 10 provinces, sub-province administrators, administrators and village administrators. Observers met regularly with the local representatives of the Referendum Commission to discuss the various aspects of the referendum preparations. These meetings were held in an informal and cooperative atmosphere, which allowed the parties to discuss freely issues of significance to the referendum and to UNOVER. These local contacts were effective in conveying the purpose of the UNOVER mission, as well

as in learning about the developments in the field with respect to the preparation for the referendum.

63. The UNOVER observers also made extensive contacts with the local population, which enhanced the latter's understanding of the referendum and the UNOVER mission. The most common encounters were with elders who usually came forward as the village representatives to speak with the observers. Many were aware that the United Nations had been invited to verify the referendum, and expressed their sincere welcome of UNOVER in that role.

64. The Secretary-General's Special Representative travelled to all UNOVER regional office sites, as well as to the towns of Agordat, Massawa and Assab. He was welcomed with great enthusiasm everywhere, particularly at Keren, where he was received by over 100,000 people from the town and the surrounding villages. In these areas, his visit symbolized the return of the United Nations to the region in a renewed and helpful role. This was especially important for winning over those with another impression of the United Nations from the 1950s and 1960s when Eritrea became first a part of the Ethiopian Federation, and then its province. Indeed, throughout Eritrea, UNOVER observers were extended an overwhelming popular welcome, and noted a positive reversal in the public perception of the United Nations.

65. UNOVER actively participated in sharpening the sense of free and fair choice among potential voters. This was emphasized during all public visits of the UNOVER Chief and other officers. A prevailing feature of UNOVER involvement in the education campaign was the teaching of the concept of every citizen's right to vote and of one vote per citizen. It also highlighted the secrecy of the vote as a basic principle of a democratic system. Certain groups of voters wondered about the need for the secrecy of the vote, and whenever possible and appropriate, UNOVER teams explained its significance and necessity.

B. Overseas activities

66. In an official communication to UNOVER, the Referendum Commission reaffirmed its commitment to facilitate and guarantee the return home of all eligible voters. Nevertheless, many voters remained abroad and the UNOVER mandate also included observation of the voting process for them. Accordingly, UNOVER conducted two large-scale operations in Ethiopia and the Sudan. Other overseas polling sites, for example, in Egypt, Iraq, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, were monitored by observers from United Nations agencies, United Nations Information Centres, the diplomatic community and non-governmental organizations. In Saudi Arabia and the other countries, arrangements to conduct polls were made in consultations between the government and local United Nations representatives.

67. The registration of voters had progressed smoothly at Addis Ababa, and was completed by early April. Identification and registration cards were distributed after experiencing some delays, but without any reports of complaints or known cases of fraud. Of 63,803 voters registered to vote in Ethiopia, 40,278 registered at Addis Ababa. The procedure for tendered ballots applied to overseas polling stations as well as within Eritrea, thus allowing voters registered in Ethiopia to vote at a polling station in Eritrea.

68. The referendum campaign was also carried out in Ethiopia, although in a relatively low-profile manner. At Addis Ababa, radio programmes broadcast voting procedures and other pertinent information. Posters explaining the referendum were observed in certain areas of Addis Ababa. No organizations publicly conducted political rallies either in favour of or against Eritrean independence.

69. For the voting in Ethiopia, UNOVER organized 10 teams to observe 202 polling stations. With the willing cooperation of all parties involved, 20 observers coordinated by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) were deployed from ECA, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Food Programme (WFP). The operation was coordinated by the Chief of the Administration Division of ECA. During the first week of April, a training seminar was organized and given at Addis Ababa by UNOVER core staff based at Asmara.

70. In the Sudan, 12 teams were planned to observe 335 polling stations located in five separate areas of the Sudan. Twenty-four observers were fielded in these teams with the cooperation and logistical support of United Nations agencies, in particular considerable assistance from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and UNDP, and from diplomatic missions at Khartoum. The Director of the United Nations Information Centre at Khartoum coordinated the preparatory aspects of the operation, and a UNOVER core staff member was appointed to oversee the observer operation during the polling days. In both Ethiopia and the Sudan, these activities coordinated by UNOVER helped to create a peaceful environment for the safe and smooth conduct of the voting.

71. In other countries where the referendum was to take place, the polling days were scheduled on different dates, as indicated by the following examples:

Australia	24-25 April 1993
Djibouti	17 April 1993
Germany	24 April 1993
India	18 April 1993
Kuwait	23 April 1993
New Zealand	24-25 April 1993
Nordic countries	17-18 April 1993
Qatar	23 April 1993
Saudi Arabia	24-25 April 1993
United Arab Emirates	16 April 1993
United States of America	24 April 1993
Yemen:	
Sanaa and El Kouka	16-18 April 1993
Taiz	16 April 1993
Houdaida	17-18 April 1993

C. Coordination with independent observers

72. At the invitation of the Referendum Commission, international observers from around the world arrived in Eritrea a few days before the referendum. These observers were to operate independently of UNOVER, and represented

Governments, regional organizations, non-governmental organizations and other organizations. They included delegations from the Organization of African Unity (OAU), the non-aligned countries, the European Community (EC) and the League of Arab States. With the UNOVER observers, the total number of international observers in Eritrea exceeded 300.

73. UNOVER cooperated closely with the independent observers, and in particular with OAU, which had sent a preparatory mission to Asmara in early April in order to coordinate activities with UNOVER. The Secretary-General authorized United Nations support for 15 OAU observers of the Eritrean referendum, although they were to remain entirely independent from UNOVER operationally.

74. Cooperation with the independent observers included coordination of deployment plans and exchanges of information. There was also discussion of evaluation standards for the referendum so as to avoid inconsistent criteria that might impair the credibility of international observation. It was agreed that one of the common objectives of international observers should be to give Eritreans confidence in a free, fair and impartial referendum.

D. Coordination with national observers

75. National observers were elected or appointed by community residents to watch over the impartiality of the voting process during the polling days. They were placed inside and outside the polling stations. Village elders and other community leaders were common among those selected. They were trained by the Referendum Commission and were supported by the "Citizens Referendum Monitoring Group". This was a national non-governmental organization committed to ensuring a free, fair and impartial referendum through a network of national observers. UNOVER was invited to attend the training seminars for national observers.

76. The main objective of the national observers was to monitor the voting process, and to point out any irregularities or anomalies that might arise from voters' unfamiliarity with the referendum. The national observers, as individuals of acknowledged standing in their respective villages, also verified the legitimacy of individual voters when questioned, and acted as impartial advisers. In addition, before the referendum, they were among the most important civic educators on the voting process. It is estimated that more than 2,000 national observers attended the referendum during the polling days. UNOVER observers exchanged information with the national observers during the referendum days, and cooperated with them to ensure smooth conduct of the polling.

E. Coordination within the United Nations system

77. Considerable importance was given to the early establishment of a unified United Nations presence in Eritrea through close contact among the various United Nations agencies based at Asmara. The Secretary-General's Special Representative reported that the local authorities welcomed this coordination. They hoped especially that this would lead to an active United Nations role in post-conflict peace-building in Eritrea as well as elsewhere in the region.

V. FINANCIAL ARRANGEMENTS

78. The Eritrean contribution to the Referendum Commission's budget amounted to US$ 480,000, accrued through a combination of funds made available by the Provisional Government, fund-raising events, and public donations.

79. Multilateral funds were channelled through the UNDP/indicative planning figure cost-sharing project, "Support for the Eritrea Referendum". Total contributions both in cash and in kind amounted to about US$ 4.3 million. In addition, US$ 171,698 was made available through a fund established by non-governmental organizations from Ireland, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

80. Australia, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, the European Community and UNDP, provided equipment, training and technical assistance. In particular, Norway generously contributed three of the four satellite terminals which constituted UNOVER's major communication equipment.

81. UNOVER itself was estimated to cost a total of US$ 3 million. Thanks in part to those contributions, the actual cost was less than US$ 2 million.

VI. CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

82. UNOVER was given a clearly defined mandate which remained essentially unchanged. This mandate was carried out on time and well within the estimated budget. Neither the difficulties of establishing and explaining voting techniques, nor logistical problems, became insurmountable obstacles. The success of UNOVER came from: a coordinated United Nations presence, reliance upon local resources, the Eritreans' commitment to support the referendum process, the cooperation of Eritrea's neighbouring countries, and the support and contributions of Member States and international and non-governmental organizations. I wish to pay warm tribute to all concerned in the preparation and execution of the very successful mission of UNOVER. Particular appreciation is due to my Special Representative, Mr. Samir Sanbar, for his skilful leadership of UNOVER. Above all, however, the Observer Mission's accomplishment was made possible by the Eritrean people's own voluntary decision to make popular participation a foundation of their political system. The United Nations stands proud to have helped them in carrying out this decision so effectively and in peace.

83. Eritrea has much still to do in building on this achievement. Three quarters of Eritrea's population today is partly dependent on food aid. Over 500,000 refugees returning to Eritrea from the neighbouring countries must be rehabilitated. After being damaged by three decades of protracted conflict, Eritrea's infrastructure needs to be rebuilt. In facing these multiple challenges, Eritrea will require the active cooperation and assistance of the United Nations and an uninterrupted period of peace and harmony in the surrounding region.

84. It is, therefore, particularly gratifying that Ethiopia was one of the very first countries to recognize Eritrea's independence opening the way to its membership in the international community. On 28 May 1993, the Eritrean flag was raised for the first time at the United Nations, and Eritrea was welcomed as the 182nd State Member of the United Nations. The determination of Ethiopia and Eritrea to work together in meeting the challenges of the future is a source of great encouragement and a bright omen for the region.